

Developing a Safer Drivers Course for Young Learner Drivers

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Abstract

This paper will focus on the process of developing the new Safer Drivers Course (the Course) for Young Learner Drivers implemented in NSW from July 2013.

The Course, focusing on awareness of risk, low risk driving and building resilience among young learner drivers aged 16-24 years of age, is an optional component of the Graduated Licensing Scheme (GLS) in NSW. The Course aims to improve road safety for young drivers, especially in the first six months when they first commence driving independently as a provisional driver. The Course comprises a three-hour facilitated small group discussion session and a two hour on-road coaching session with two learners and a coach. A key Course requirement is that a learner driver must have completed a minimum of 50 hours on-road supervised driving experience to register for the Course.

The curriculum framework for the Course was developed by a Board of Independent Road Safety Experts and supported by an Advisory Panel, adopting key adolescent learning principles, road safety research findings, and best practice driver education. This process involved extensive stakeholder consultation and collaboration among community organisations, the driver training industry, and road safety researchers.

This paper will include a summary of the key principles of Course design, key delivery considerations and an overview of the process that contributed to the development of this new initiative that aims to improve road safety for young drivers in NSW.

Keywords

Young drivers, education, policy development, graduated licensing, driver training, learner drivers

Background

In March 2011, the NSW Government announced the establishment of a Board of Independent Road Safety Experts (the Board) to develop a new course for young learner drivers. At this time, the Government announced that completion of the new course, which aims to improve the safety of novice drivers, would provide a reduction of 20 hours from the current 120 hour supervised driving requirement in the learner log book.

Specifically, the Board was tasked to make recommendations on the curriculum framework and delivery options for the Course. The Board also investigated options to assist learner drivers in lower socio-economic, remote and Aboriginal communities to meet the learner supervised driving hour requirements and made recommendations regarding the impact of the introduction of the Course on the existing ‘3-for-1’ policy¹.

From April to August 2012 the Board conducted meetings and workshops to consider evidence, discuss Course design principles and make recommendations on the Curriculum

¹ The 3-for-1 policy allows learner drivers to record one hour of structured lessons with a licensed driving instructor as three hours in their learner driver log book (up to a maximum of 10 hours).

framework. The Board was assisted in this process by an Advisory Panel of community and industry members with an interest in driver training and a Secretariat from Transport for NSW (TfNSW). The Board submitted its final report to NSW Government in late 2012 with recommendations on the curriculum framework and delivery options for the Course, the 3-for-1 policy and options to assist learner drivers from remote, lower socio-economic and Aboriginal communities.

Following approval of the Board’s recommendations, TfNSW undertook course development with RMS including detailed development of Course materials and delivery model, accreditation of providers, and development of systems and processes for Course administration.

The Course, comprised a three-hour facilitated group discussion module and a two-hour in-vehicle coaching module, addresses awareness of risk, low risk driving and building resilience. It also complements existing programs and requirements for the learner drivers in the NSW GLS. The Course was implemented in NSW from 1 July 2013 and is an Australian first in combining theoretical and practical driving education for learners. The Course is integrated within the learner period of the NSW Graduated Licensing Scheme (GLS).

As per the recommendations of the Board, the Course reflects international best practice in young driver education and is based, as far as possible, on the best available research on road safety issues facing young drivers when they first drive solo. In particular, the Course reflects key principles of adolescent cognitive development principles which highlight the importance of extended supervised driving experience, low risk driving strategies, and a peer discussion and coaching learning environment.

Development of Course Curriculum

In developing the proposed curriculum framework for the Course, the Board undertook the following process:

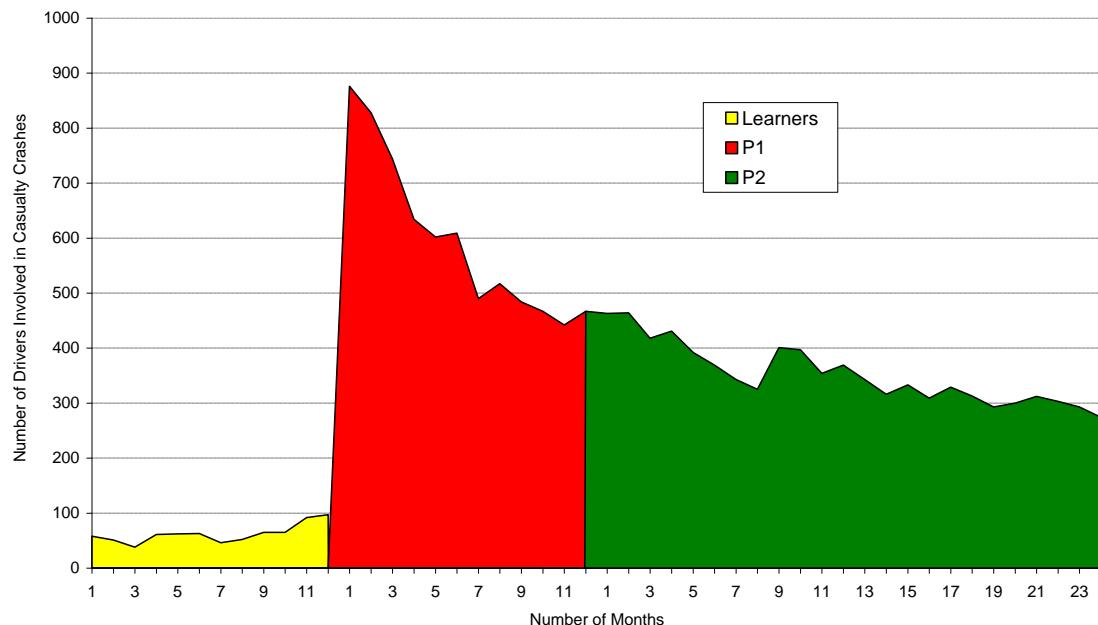
1. Considering available research and studies by conducting literature reviews, identifying key programs and learner driver resources in Australia, and receiving presentations from community stakeholders, including road safety researchers and practitioners.
2. Identifying fundamental road safety principles and elements to help define Course aims, objectives, outcomes and content elements.
3. Establishing key design principles to underpin course development.
4. Seeking inputs from the expert stakeholders on key design principles, essential course elements, and the proposed Course curriculum framework.

Crash analysis

As part of evidence gathering, crash data analysis was undertaken to understand the key issues for young drivers in NSW when they first drive independently on a P1 provisional licence. Crash data show that young drivers (aged 17-25 years) are more likely to be involved in crashes resulting in death or injury than other drivers. In particular, young drivers are most

likely to be involved in a crash in the first few months of driving on a provisional P1 licence (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Crash Involvement, NSW 2007 – 2011 (Driver licence class, month of tenure)
(Source: NSW Centre for Road Safety, 2013)



The key contributing factors for NSW young drivers in serious crashes are speed, drink driving and fatigue. From 2007 – 2011, NSW crash data shows:

- Speed was identified as a factor for 43% of Provisional (light passenger vehicle) drivers involved in fatal crashes.
- Illegal alcohol was detected in 22% of Provisional (light passenger vehicle) drivers involved in fatal crashes.
- Fatigue was identified as a factor for 12% of Provisional (light passenger vehicle) drivers involved in fatal crashes.²

Generally, the crash data demonstrate that the key reasons for young driver crashes are issues of choice rather than driving skill, and relate to driver inexperience, poor decision making, poor hazard perception and an inflated belief in their own ability.

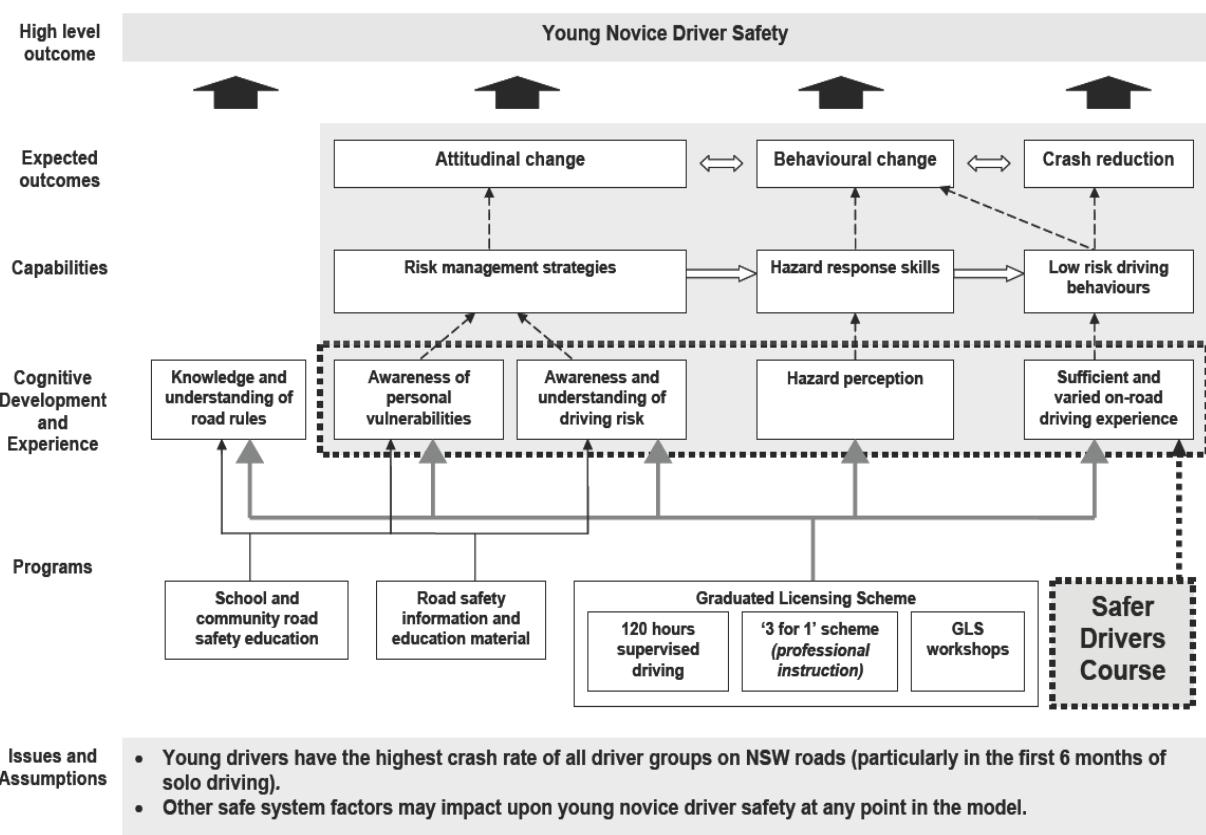
Development of program logic model

Based on the evidence gathered by the Board, a program logic model (see figure 2 below) was developed to demonstrate the multiple factors and programs that interact to produce positive road safety outcomes for young drivers in NSW. The model aims to highlight the specific contributions that this Course will make and help to guide the monitoring and evaluation of

² Note that, generally, the data on fatalities are more reliable than that for injuries on contributing factors.

Course effectiveness.

Figure 2: Program logic model for young driver safety in NSW



The model shows that the NSW GLS³ provides the licensing framework to ensure a level of safe driving capability when learners are permitted to drive on NSW roads. Under the NSW GLS, a driver needs to be 16 years of age or older and pass a Driver Knowledge Test to become a learner. When issued with a learner licence, the learner receives a Learner Driver Log Book to record their driving experience. Before young learner drivers (aged under 25) can attempt the Driving Test they must currently log at least 120 hours of supervised driving, hold their learner licence for a minimum of 12 months and be aged least 17 years. Additional licensing requirements and restrictions also apply to provisional drivers under the NSW GLS⁴. The deterrent effect of both fines and the potential loss of licence is also a crucial

³ Since significant reforms to the NSW Graduated Licensing Scheme in 2007, provisional P1 fatal crashes reduced by 28 percent in the four years from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2011.

⁴ More detail on the NSW Graduated Licensing Scheme is available on the Roads and Maritime Services internet site (www.rms.nsw.gov.au).

element of NSW’s GLS approach, with both lower Blood Alcohol Levels and lower thresholds for licence suspension. This is supported by concerted enforcement activity.

The model also recognises the contribution of a range of Government and non-Government road safety education programs to improving safety outcomes for young drivers and supports the design of the Course to complement, rather than replace, existing road safety education programs.

The model highlights the key capabilities that the Course will help to develop including risk management strategies, hazard response skills and low risk driving behaviours. In addition, while the framework helps to understand the relationships between program inputs and their contribution to outcomes, the program logic model also provides a monitoring and evaluation framework for the Course.

Research Evidence and Design Principles

The Board noted the strong research evidence of the benefits of extended on-road supervised driving experience for learner drivers and its suggestion that the more hours a learner can practise, the better the road safety outcome. The Board’s view was that the Course must be designed to complement on-road practice, build on the protective benefits that supervised driving experience has for young learner drivers, and target cognitive and behavioural elements to enhance low risk driving capabilities of the young learner driver.

The research evidence considered also suggested driver training that only focuses on vehicle control is unlikely to achieve a road safety benefit and can lead to driver over-confidence. To have the best chance of success, the Board viewed that the Course needed to be structured to address higher order skills such as hazard perception and risk taking.

The Board established the objectives of the Course to focus on assisting young learners to:

- improve their capabilities to drive safely by reducing and managing their road safety risks
- acquire additional safe driving skills, knowledge and insights into their driving vulnerabilities, to complement their on-road driving experience within the context of the log book driving requirement.

Importantly, the Board recommended that the Course should be delivered using a best practice approach for educating young people based on adolescent learning principles including a focus on attitudinal and behavioural change.

To achieve the above objectives, the Course is designed to:

- assist learner drivers understand the heightened risk once they cease to be a supervised learner driver and drive independently, and that they can reduce this risk by adopting specific positive strategies
- acquaint learner drivers with the typical crash scenarios that young solo drivers experience and to make links with common young driver behaviour
- provide learner drivers with specific “safe” driving strategies which can complement their on-road driving experience undertaken through supervised driving
- highlight to learner drivers that their safety and vulnerability as independent drivers is in their hands and will depend on: the choices and decisions they make, their attitudes

and risk taking actions

- assist learner drivers to become more resilient to pressures which heighten their risk of negative road safety outcomes (such as peer and social influences, distraction, driving at dangerous times, pressure from passengers)
- encourage learner drivers to practise the safe driving strategies recommended in the Course, including hazard perception and speed management, and to ensure the consistency of messages between the Course and supervising drivers.

The key Course design principles are as follows:

- Course to seek to enhance on-road supervised driving experience and improve road safety for young drivers when they first drive solo (initial stages of P1 period).
- Course to target learners with a minimum 50 hours supervised driving experience.
- Elements of existing programs which demonstrated some potential for success have been adopted or adapted.
- Includes coaching and driver self-assessment approaches.

Course Curriculum Framework

The curriculum framework includes two modules:

- Module 1: Face to face facilitated group discussion (3 hours duration)
- Module 2: In-vehicle coaching (2 hours duration)

Module 1 is designed as a face to face facilitated group discussion with up to 12 learner participants, led by a facilitator with experience working with young people. Key aims of the content proposed for Module 1 are to assist learners to:

- Understand that young drivers are at the highest risk of crashing when they first transition from supervised to independent driving.
- Understand that young drivers can reduce their risk of crashing by adopting safe driving behaviours, minimising risk taking and making safe on-road decisions.
- Understand the relationship between typical poor driving behaviours (for example following behaviour, gap selection, hazard perception, speed selection) and increased crash risk.
- Understand the impact that peer influence and passenger behaviour have on crash risks and develop strategies to address these risks including late-night driving, drugs and alcohol, and general lifestyle pressures that can lead to speeding and driver distraction and fatigue.

Module 2 is designed as an in-vehicle module with a coaching based approach and is conducted with two participants in a vehicle by a qualified driving instructor/ coach. Key aims of the on-road coaching module are to assist learners in the following ways:

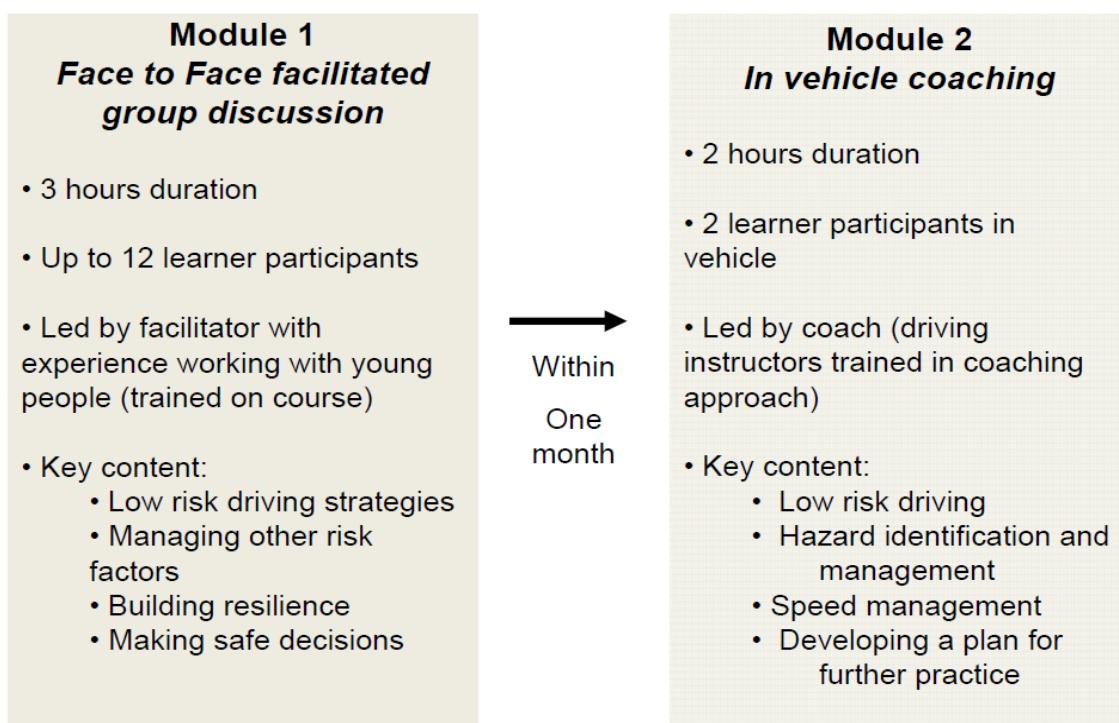
- Coach learner drivers by tailoring to their learning needs.
- Reinforce and practise low risk driving behaviours explored in Module 1 including

safe gap selection, following distances (three second gap), recognition and response to hazards, stopping needs and speed management.

- Provide feedback on the learner’s driving behaviours by comparing them with safe driving norms and strategies.
- Help learner drivers build resilience in adopting safe driving behaviour.
- Identify learning goals to focus the learner’s practice in the remainder of the logged supervised hours with assistance from parents or supervising drivers.

An overview of key content and delivery features of each module are illustrated in Figure 3, below.

Figure 3: Overview of Curriculum Framework for Safer Drivers Course



Course delivery

A key focus of Course delivery is ensuring that both Module 1 and 2 are delivered by appropriately qualified trainers that are able to effectively engage young people. To meet this aim, only Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) accredited Course providers are permitted to deliver the Course. Additionally, all trainers must meet minimum qualifications⁵ and must complete a specifically designed training program for the Safer Drivers Course. The training program covers the Course curriculum, road safety information and building the capacity of trainers to facilitate or coach more effectively. Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) have engaged Providers through a tender process to provide accreditation for qualified providers.

⁵ Minimum qualifications for facilitators is a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Minimum qualifications for coaches is a current, unrestricted NSW Driving Instructor Licence.

The Course is available to current learners in NSW and is set at an affordable level by the NSW Government (currently \$140). Additional costs of Course delivery is met by the NSW Government, through the Community Road Safety Fund, to ensure that all learners have access to the Course at the same price.

Providers are required to deliver the Course in accordance with the materials developed by the Centre for Road Safety, Transport for NSW. These materials include a participant workbook that is designed to provide a resource for learner drivers to reference during the Course and throughout the remainder of the learner period. All audio-visual media used throughout the Course to guide discussion of key road safety issues were also developed by the Centre for Road Safety.

The first Safer Drivers Courses for learner drivers were delivered by accredited Course providers in July 2013. For the first six months, the Course is available in selected metropolitan and regional locations only. To ensure broader rollout of the Course across a greater geographical area of NSW, procurement of providers for delivery of the Course from January 2014 is currently in progress.

Communication and Information

The rollout of the Safer Drivers Course was supported by the development of a comprehensive communications strategy that set out key messages for learners relating to the Course. This included highlighting that the intention of the Course was to complement existing GLS requirements and assist learners to become safer drivers when they graduate to their P-plates. Some of the key items include:

- Development of an award-winning video to promote the Safer Driver Course.⁶
- A range of media coverage in July and August both in regional and local newspapers,
- Roads and Maritime Services ‘Helping Learner Drivers Become Safer Drivers’ workshops promoting the workshops to parents of supervising drivers
- The annual Bstreetsmart Event held on 20-22 August 2013 with over 18,000 senior high school students attending. CRS delivered a presentation promoting the Safer Drivers Course.
- Transport for NSW also plans to release a range of posters and other promotional resources for motor registries to promote the course to the general community.

Monitoring and evaluation

Early analysis of Course participation has indicated that initial demand for the Course has been strong among learners and their parents. This suggests the demand for increased driver education programs for learner drivers is strong. Initial feedback from Course providers has suggested that delivery principles set out for the Course align with community expectations.

Given the unique nature of the Course and being the first of its kind, regular monitoring of Course delivery and participant feedback will continue throughout the early stages of implementation to identify any intended and unintended impacts of the Course and make adjustments where necessary.

⁶ The Safer Drivers Course video won a 2013 Clarion Award in the category of “Experiential Campaign”
The Clarion Awards is run by the International Visual Communication Association (IVCA).

Quality assurance of course delivery has been undertaken by project staff, with providers progressively visited by CRS to provide support to ensure the Course is provided at the expected standard.

A course evaluation plan has been developed to guide the data collection and course monitoring so that a formal evaluation can be conducted in 3 to 5 years time. In the interim, course monitoring and provider visits will assist in identifying lessons learnt and areas for improvement regarding Course content and delivery.

The program logic model for safer young novice drivers in NSW (see Figure 2, on page 4), will provide a framework for the formal evaluation. This will focus on the driving experience, the cognitive development areas the Course intends to develop and the capabilities and expected outcomes for young learner drivers.

According to the model, the Course will be assessed on its effectiveness in building cognitive development and driving experience capabilities by framing evaluation questions to participants around realistic expected outcomes in the following areas:

- Awareness of personal vulnerabilities
- Awareness and understanding of driving risks
- Awareness of low risk driving strategies including hazard perception and speed management
- Sufficient and varied on-road driving experience

On a longer term basis, further research and analysis will be designed to track for Course participants the effects of the Course on behavioural, attitudinal and crash reduction outcomes that are key contributing factors to young novice driver safety.

Conclusion

The design, development and initial rollout of the Safer Drivers Course for learner drivers represent a significant step forward in the development of driver education for learner drivers. By integrating best practice in young driver education with the Graduated Licensing Scheme, the Safer Drivers Course offers a real option for learners in NSW to improve their safe driving capabilities.

While initial demand for the Course has been encouraging, continued monitoring and evaluation of the Safe Driving outcomes for Course participants will be important to determine any required changes to Course design in order to meet road safety aims.

The development of this Course is a good example of how the gathering of the experts in the field, and open and honest consultation and communication with key stakeholders, can help to innovate and develop a robust road safety product for young people.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the assistance from the Board of Independent Road Safety Experts, Advisory Panel and Roads and Maritime Services in the development of the Safer Drivers Course.